

**Prepared Remarks of U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara
Dutchess County Law Day Dinner and Annual Celebration
May 7, 2015**

Thanks

- Thanks to Judge Mora for that kind introduction.
- Thank you to the Dutchess County Bar Association for inviting me to be here tonight.
 - o Shout out to the 2015-2016 Officers who are being sworn in tonight.
- Congratulations to Jeff Feldman for receiving the Gartland Award for Community Service. Your commitment to service serves as an inspiration to us all.

Caseload

- Duty to keep our homeland secure, our markets fair, our streets safe, and our government honest.
- In service of that mission, we do many important things: we investigate and prosecute gangs, terrorists, Ponzi schemes like Madoff's, banks, civil rights matters, public safety.

- Our narcotics work, which might not receive as much press as other areas, is also central to the office's mission, so let me briefly mention a case that is directly relevant to you folks here tonight.
- Just last week, we announced the guilty plea of a Dutchess County man for distributing heroin peddled under the label "Breaking Bad." The heroin in this case was particularly potent because it was enhanced with the opiate fentanyl and it, unfortunately and tragically, caused the deaths of three people.
- While the outcome of this prosecution may do little to console the family members who lost their loved ones to the scourge of heroin, we can hope, however, that the significant penalties that defendant faces will deter those who peddle deadly drugs and avoid the tragedy that the young victims and their families have suffered.
- We held a press conference in June 2014 announcing the charges in this case and I said then as I will repeat now:
 - o My office considers this type of work vitally important and we intend to continue to aggressively confront the epidemic of heroin and prescription painkiller abuse spreading across Dutchess County and our country.

Public Corruption

- We also do public corruption work, and as you might know, we announced new public corruption charges earlier this week.
- But what is the point of our anti-corruption work? Why is it important?
- Public corruption has a massive opportunity cost. And it is a cost that no one can afford anymore.
- That is especially so when the center of gravity for so much of what you care about and are convening about is state government.
- It turns out that what happens in Albany, what transpires in state government, matters.
- State legislators, believe it or not, are important.
- Each senator represents more than 300,000 people; each assemblyman, almost 130,000.
- Senators confirm appointments of state officials and court judges.

- State lawmakers determine our budget. They decide how much money goes to children's education, to public safety, to transportation, to health, and to public welfare.
- They decide what we pay in rent and housing and in taxes. They decide what constitutes a crime and how it should be punished. And they draw the boundaries of the electoral districts in which we live, work, and vote.
- Separate apart from all the things legislators are supposed to do for ordinary citizens, think of the things they could do.
- It's been said that the real work of innovation and entrepreneurship and change takes place not at the federal level but in state governments, and lots of states like to boast about that. State governments are supposed to be engines for innovation and change; they're supposed to be incubators for new ideas.
- And this type of work is ESPECIALLY important now. In fact, I would argue that State government has never been so important.
- Because with a gridlocked Washington increasingly lacking the will to tackle big, thankless problems like infrastructure, we need a State government that is willing and capable of tackling the pressing public policy challenges of our times.

- Edward R. Murrow observed, “A nation of sheep will beget a government of wolves.”
- At the end of the day, it seems that a culture of corruption has developed and grown, just like barnacles on a boat bottom.
- And it seems that such a culture has become so embedded that even a series of tough and successful prosecutions that have separated so many lawmakers from their liberty has not been enough to thwart others from following in their felonious footsteps.

Family

- So, as is probably clear by now, we have a daunting caseload. But perhaps even more daunting than the caseload I oversee is the knowledge that I head an office that has employed, before me, countless numbers of great lawyers who have literally made history in service to the public, both while in the Office and after leaving it.

- Those who have served in the Southern District include lawyers who have gone on to become Mayor of New York, Governor of New York, Secretary of War, Secretary of Homeland Security, Attorney General, and Supreme Court Justice. Their names include Root, Dewey, Morgenthau, Harlan, and Frankfurter.
- What made these individuals great lawyers?
- They all had what are, in my view, the following special qualities, which typically exist in uneasy tension but which the truly great lawyer can hold in easy equipoise:
 - o A commitment to principles, but also a capacity for pragmatism;
 - o Respect for our democratic institutions, but also a yearning for their improvement;
 - o A penchant for passionate advocacy, but also an appreciation for moderation;
 - o Skill in being an adversary without becoming an enemy;
 - o The wisdom to learn and understand both sides of an issue;

- And the ability to view all parties – whether victims or witnesses or criminal defendants – always as human beings with dignity and self-worth.
- And so to follow in those footsteps and inherit that history is to be both humbled and inspired every day – humbled to be in the company of giants on whose shoulders I stand, and inspired by their example to serve justice and only justice in all that I do.
- And lest I ever forget that legacy, in the hallway on the approach to my office is a wall of photographs of each of my predecessors going back a century. So I see their faces every single day.
- *I sometimes think that Giuliani is looking at me a little funny, but I'm sure that's just my imagination.*
- I don't know that I will ever come close to living up to even the least of those legends. But I have pledged to do my best every day.

Conclusion

- Let me finish by making a point about the law and its role in fostering the American dream. It is popular to disparage lawyers and the law, and much of that disparagement is very richly deserved.
- But in my view, part of the cynicism about lawyers springs from a failure to appreciate the majesty and power of the law itself, especially as an embodiment of American values and as one source of American greatness.
- Now, our system of laws is not perfect and God knows there are imperfect practitioners within that system (you're looking at one of them), but what the system aspires to do deserves respect, and perhaps even awe.
- And that system should never be taken for granted because what we have is truly exceptional.
- Among other things, in this country, the law is the great equalizer.
- In this country, no one is above the law, no matter who you are, who you know, or how much money and power you possess.

- And there are precious few countries, even in 2014, where that would not be a completely laughable statement, including the country of my birth.
- What's more, the law not only equalizes; in this country, where more languages and cultures and cuisines coexist than anywhere else, the law also binds us together in ways that we too seldom appreciate.
- In a way and over time, the law has become part of the essential social and cultural glue of America.
- Because whatever name you give your God; whatever book you deem scripture; whatever rituals of religious faith you observe; whether you are orthodox or reformed; whether you are devout or lapsed; whether you pray or not, if you are an American, you are bound to every one of your fellows in the greatest country that has ever existed by a pious faith in enduring principles of liberty and equality and the rule of law.
- That is the founding formula for our country, for our democracy, for our prosperity.
- That is the reason that people of all faiths and all colors and all cultures come here; that is the reason that those same people invest here and build here and stay here.

- That's the reason my own family came. And it is the reason that I am standing before you today – the son of a father who came from virtually nothing, who was born 74 years ago in a colony still ruled in the name of the King of England, who later absconded to the U.S. with barely pennies in his pocket and with a young wife and an infant son with an unpronounceable name – who, less than forty years later, has somehow become the chief federal law enforcement officer in the financial capital of the world and is now improbably speaking before a captive audience in this ballroom.
- Now, how a kid like me, named Preet Bharara, who hails from Punjab, India – by way of Jersey(!) – is even permitted to be up here, at this podium, on this morning, for this occasion, is almost beyond my humble power to process. And yet here we are.
- Part of the reason that this can be, I believe, is that the United States has built a system of laws (even if flawed and frequently in need of repair) that enshrines the right to equal opportunity and embodies the sacred American ideal that every child – even a poor or orphaned or immigrant child – can rise higher than that child's parents could ever have imagined.

- *And so the law – provided that it is wisely fashioned and righteously applied and faithfully interpreted and nobly practiced by enough people of good will and good faith – provides the bedrock foundation for the freedom, the opportunity, and the prosperity that make America the greatest and most diverse nation the world has ever known.*
- And that is why, though we lawyers are – as a group – much maligned, I continue to believe that to become a lawyer is to join a noble profession.
- Because there is no one better situated to promote equality, preserve liberty, and prevent cruelty than the person who has genuinely dedicated himself to becoming both a master and a servant of the law.
- **That is why I am so proud to be a lawyer and so honored to be able to address this crowd here tonight.**
- Thank you.